

The Christian News-Letter

No. 257

Edited by
KATHLEEN BLISS

3rd April, 1946

DEAR MEMBER,
We have frequently said in the News-Letter that if Christians are to act responsively in the world in which they live, they need to be aware not only of immediate and particular problems and crises, but of the great sweeping changes which bend the course of history. One of these is the pressure on events of rises and falls of population.

THE DIMINISHING WEST

A hundred and fifty years ago a mild little cleric working in Jesus College, Cambridge, threw all his educated contemporaries into a frenzy of alarm by proving, seemingly beyond doubt, that increases in population, such as were then taking place in England, were inevitably followed by starvation, pestilence or war, which adjusted the population to the means available for its support. Malthus is now regarded as an alarmist in his conclusions, and at the same time, as the originator of the scientific study of population trends. In one part of the world his gloomy prognosis seems to be very near to fulfilment. India, whose population has increased by a hundred millions in forty years without any comparable increase in food production now stands on the brink of famine. The point of mentioning this fact in a Christian News-Letter is that the Christian instinct to save life, to combat disease and to substitute peace for strife has, during the last two hundred years, contributed very greatly to the saving of life in India.

Nature left entirely to herself seems to pursue a policy of lightly come lightly go in all animal life. Men have always protested against death and striven to fend it off. Only at the end of the eighteenth century and in western Europe did they discover the means of so controlling the forces of malnutrition and disease as to bring about an enduring balance in favour of life against death. The question then had to be asked and answered, if men can now preserve life by saving so many mothers in childbirth and so many children in infancy, so that life no longer goes lightly, can they still allow it to come lightly?

As we all know the question has in practice been answered. The birthrate of western Europe and the United States has been falling for over sixty years until now it only just keeps pace with the death rate. In an authoritative volume on the subject of

population Alva Myrdal,¹ an eminent Swedish child specialist, remarks that we can only fully understand the revolution that has taken place if we realize that the reduction in the number of births is the result not of the sudden technical feasibility of birth control, but of a deep change in motivation. Procreation is now regarded as part of the *rational* activities of mankind. To support this statement she produces facts to show that only a small proportion of the birth control practised by the majority of couples with a view to limiting and spacing their children owes anything to the use of technical contraceptives. There have probably been people since the world began who in their married life have limited the size of their families. They have now become a majority.

POPULATION POLICY

Modern family limitation on a wide scale is not solely an urban phenomenon. The first community to practise it to an extent sufficient to lower the birthrate of a whole nation was the agrarian population of France, where economic factors made further subdivision of land holdings highly undesirable. Wherever the relevant evidence is available it goes to prove that it was among older women who already had some children and not, as is often assumed, among the young and pleasure-seeking that family limitation began. (Indeed, Dr. Myrdal's statistics show that the amount spent by the average family on all leisure activities would not support even one child.) Dr. Myrdal makes the significant comment that the critical point at which the family began to lose in size and cohesion was not when women began to take up other interests, but when it became the universal practice for men to go away all day to work. Until that time married women were not conscious of their isolation, and the burden of the care of young children was more equally shared. Men went out to work and women began to feel isolated, tied and left behind.

There is a real tension between the way in which family limitation is viewed by individual families and by the state. As children are the single greatest cause of poverty, family limitation has meant a higher standard of living for those children who are born. The tenacity with which families resist a reduction in standard of living by the addition of a third or perhaps fourth child is well known, though perhaps those who talk about the beauty of sacrifice for one's children do not realize that additions to the family on a limited budget often have to be made at the expense of the first children.

The state, on the other hand, has to look at broader issues. A declining population is one in which there is an exaggerated pro-

¹ *Nation and Family*: Kegan Paul, 21s.

portion of old people. These have to be supported by the productivity of those of working age and this burden further decreases incentives to parenthood. The state has also to think of its own survival into the future. Where would be the encouragement to build schools and to embark upon schemes of social betterment, to spend money upon cities and parks which the present generation cannot enjoy, if the country is ceasing to produce the children who might enter into this heritage?

A conversation therefore has to take place, as it were, between families and societies as a whole, to see whether the rights, duties and pleasures of families and the larger ends of the state can be better harmonized. Dr. Myrdal's book is of primary importance for all who want to find an answer to this question which does full justice to both. She insists that in thinking about population there must be less head-counting and more emphasis on values, and she describes the way in which in Sweden the state succeeded in so stimulating public interest in the question of population, that over a period of years before the war discussion went on up and down the country. The result was that a new integrating factor was brought into social legislation, which is now aimed less at abolishing particular evils and is being increasingly directed to answering the question, how can we build up a society in which, without being compelled, parents will want to have more children.

EATING OUR CAKE AND HAVING IT

Much of this is highly relevant to our own situation as we embark upon vast new schemes of housing, social insurance and many measures with far-reaching social consequences. It may be that without knowing it we are as a nation pursuing conflicting social ends. That the Government in our own country is beginning to be concerned by the falling birth rate is shown in the recent appointment of a Royal Commission on Population. A beginning is being made with family allowances. When the post-war boom in babies, now at its height, is over, we shall doubtless hear more of the subject of population.

On the one hand, we are building up greatly increased educational, medical and health and insurance services. Seventy per cent of the teachers of this country are women. All but a minute proportion of the nursing profession are women. The domestic staffs of hospitals are women. We need many thousands more of all three categories. The clerks and typists of the lower ranks of the civil service are also women. The new state services will demand a great increase in their numbers. The keeping of all insurance records

will alone be an immense clerical undertaking. Most of it will be done by machines which can be operated best and perhaps only by young girls with nimble fingers and not much objection to boredom.

Broadly speaking, we can say that the new social legislation is built up on the work of women. The Government is expecting to keep armed forces at the level of one million men, and needs a greatly increased labour force for its export drive and for the building of houses. There is, therefore, little hope of running our health, social and educational services by any other means than by the labour of women.

What resources in woman power have we to meet all these demands? There are roughly two million women in this country who may be expected never to marry. Not all of these are free to work. The second source of supply is young women between the time of leaving school and marriage. This age-group is now reflecting the drastic fall in the birth-rate after 1920. The raising of the school-leaving age will further reduce this category. The result of this shortage has been that in recent years restrictions against women in employment getting married have gone down like nine-pins. Such restrictions were an encouragement to unofficial liaisons between the sexes, and their disappearance is to be welcomed.

Married women are the nation's great reserve of labour. During the war seven and a half million women were in employment, full or part-time. About half the married women in this total had left employment by the end of last year and they are continuing to do so. So acute is the shortage of labour in some occupations that for the first time in the nation's history married women are being asked by a peace-time Government to remain at work. But many questions remain: if the labour of women is so keenly sought, what will be the effect on the birthrate? The old question, "Ought a married woman to work?" has, since the war, become a new question, "Ought the working woman—particularly the woman with special gifts, training and experience—to be debarred from having children?" There is no clear-cut Yes or No with which it can be answered. This is one of the great social problems which has to be worked out not by legislation, but in living experience during the next few years.

Yours sincerely,

Kathleen Bliss

THE INCOMPETENCE OF UNAIDED VIRTUE OR THE MISCHIEF OF IDEALS

BY V. A. DEMANT

DR. WILLIAM TEMPLE said in his C.N.-L. Supplement of Christmas, 1943, that the crisis of our modern society is a cultural and not a moral or political one. I want to enlarge upon that, because it is important for effectively approaching two problems which are of special concern to C.N.-L. readers. The first is to get some kind of real community without losing the freedom which Britain and America have fought to defend; one aspect of this problem is how to give the mass of men the right to existence, to function and to status without making them undifferentiated cogs in a society organized as a mechanism. The second task underlies the first; how to teach and learn the Christian religion so that it becomes for our own age a formative influence in the renewal of society, as it was for earlier periods. That involves re-learning it as something which is independent of, so that it can minister to, the human problem at each stage; and recovery from being merely the religiously tinged expression of society's own aspirations. This Supplement can only deal with the first question.

AIMS AND CULTURE

For any power in undertaking the task there stated, the distinction between the aims and the culture of a period becomes important. If there is a sickness in the culture, no aims moral or political, however strongly held, can be achieved. Man has not the absolute freedom of God, nor the complete self-determination of pure spirit, like the Angels. Only when some parts of his life are strong and reliable is he free to act in other matters. The inner life of the human being has two parts, which we may call the spirit and the soul. The spirit is the clear, deliberate and active force, it reasons, wills and makes acts of faith; the soul is the less conscious complex mass of emotions, sentiments, attitudes, habits, hidden tendencies, which provide the energy of life. The first gives direction, the second power. But the soul life has a certain direction of its own, and where this is formed to support the spirit we have a strong rich fruitful personality, and, if it pulls in an opposite direction the aims and decisions of the spirit are frustrated. All men know something of this conflict, and any Christian should understand it, for it is the very problem that Christianity meets. St. Paul's whole theology is built upon his having found a power outside himself which takes possession of him, the law "of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus," and which unites what had been his divided state "the law in my members, warring against the law of my mind" (Romans vii and viii).

Now, there is an analogous situation in society. Each community has its aims *and* its culture. The former is what it stands for, the

latter what it stands on. When these two work together society is in a creative stage. But when they are opposed there is a state of disintegration, and at some point a state of crisis, and in such a situation to proclaim the recognized ideals and aims and to intensify effort to attain them is merely to magnify the fruitless and explosive tension of the times. It is making appeals to which men are not in a position to respond, for the energies of their souls are moving in another direction.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "CULTURE" AND WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO IT?

It is, I hope, clear that I am using the word culture with a wider meaning than the activities which adorn life; I am employing it rather as the anthropologist uses it, for the ways of life that the members of a community can count on. Perhaps it is not the best word, but it has two advantages. First, it conveys the notion that this is something that has grown, it comes out of the past and forms a tradition. Tradition is essential for human action in the present, and the contempt with which it is often treated to-day is due to a disastrous belief that the human will is like a man who could wield a lever without a fulcrum or his own stance. Secondly, the word "culture" emphasizes that the thing requires cultivation; it does not grow naturally like a forest. If it is not tended it may live on for a time, centuries even, but it eventually dies. And it dies when men take it for granted as if it were in the nature of things instead of a historic growth that has to be tended by recurrent renewals of its inner principle.

I am now suggesting that our present-day crisis in the West is the culmination of a period, roughly the last three centuries, in which men have tried to live by and to fortify the aims they learnt to pursue in the formative stage of European civilization, while the culture out of which these aims arose has largely been lost or has decayed, and has now all but been destroyed. People have relied on the inherited culture underneath their aims, as if it were emerging to greater fullness from the restrictions of the past. This they called Progress or Social Evolution. The men of the Nineteenth Century believed that they were providing man on a historically guaranteed road with more efficient tools. Because they took their culture for granted—hardly thought about it and did not refer the new powers to it—the vast forces of social change took charge and human purposes were steadily moulded by the changes instead of the other way round. That is why the society of the Twentieth Century, as Mr. Christopher Dawson has said, is not the kind of society the men of the Nineteenth thought they were creating. They were on the whole in the humanist, liberal tradition of the late European period, and they believed that they were merely giving men greater powers to embody that tradition. The decline of that tradition is a tragedy, and we must not make cheap religious propaganda by acclaiming its decline. But we may rightly understand and declare it to be the withering of a flower torn from its soil.

While it is not until the Twentieth Century that the pattern of European culture is radically threatened, there had been, of course, since the Renaissance, several intellectual, political and religious revolts from the past of Europe. But they all assumed that the foundations of that culture were permanent. The cult of the enlarged individual of the Renaissance, presupposed the pattern of community living of the Middle Ages. The philosophers of the Seventeenth Century, with their faith in man's glorious future through mathematical knowledge and clear ideas, just took for granted that their intellectual stratum would continue to be fed and bred by the biological, domestic and craft basis of society that would look after itself and increase in strength, carried out by men whose cultural ideal was the country gentleman. The early socialists were the champions of status for the artisans, which idea they inherited from the past, and the notion of corporate functional responsibility from the Guilds. Throughout this period too the family was believed in, even amid capitalism which did most to destroy it. All this means that just as the culture of a society is a slow growth, its decline is much slower than the rise and fall of movements which challenge its aims. But now in the Twentieth Century the conflict is cruelly apparent. The culture of European civilization is almost worn out; and other cultures of an entirely different order have taken its place.

In our generation there are seen two attempts to deal with this crisis. The continental movements summed up in Kolnac's phrase *War against the West* were terrible attempts to heal the split between aims and culture by abolishing the aims. The "Democracies," as they are called, still retain a strong devotion to the values and aims of European civilization, but their culture, the pattern of habits that mould the soul, has been destructive of the European inheritance and is pulling against the conscious ideals. Hence the panic-stricken moral appeals to be socially or internationally minded; the cry for more education, for more control and planning, for more law. Mankind is to be stuck together on the top storey because it has no longer roots in a common culture. The artificiality of all this is due to the fact that neither education, nor politics, nor planning can create a culture; all those things can only grow out of one, to borrow a phrase of T. S. Eliot's with regard to education.

THE AIMS WHICH ARE STILL RETAINED

What are these aims we still cling to? They are I think mainly four. First, the belief in truth—something objective to be sought and not merely a set of notions convenient to a particular sect in the general flux. This is the basis of the grand scientific tradition of the West, now in danger of being merely the lackey of political power and commercial struggle. Secondly, faith in a standard of right and wrong, disguised by but not obliterated by the relative and shifting norms of changing periods and varying regimes—a standard by which men can judge the validity of what is going on, and not a dogma adopted to further one's success in the struggle for existence. Thirdly, the idea of a law valid for all men, irrespective of their serviceability or nuisance to society. This implies

that the ruling power is the administrator, not the creator, of Law. The law is above the state. Fourthly, a sense of the universality of mankind, a fundamental "metaphysical" equality which underlies all divisions brought about by geography, history and conflict.

Now, though they do not originate with Christianity as ideals, these aims only became supported by a concrete culture by reason of certain Christian presuppositions and patterns of behaviour. The first two of these aims, for instance—the belief in truth and right and wrong—rest upon an outlook for which the central reality of the Universe transcends the temporal and historical process. Belief in truth and right withers as soon as men feel themselves to be only parts of an immanent flux. Man has no link with anything outside the process. Then, the notion of the person as having priority over and not merely existence for the temporal community was stamped upon men's minds, not so much by positive teaching, but by there being a counter institution, the Church, whose very existence upheld the axiom that there are some spheres of life in which the writ of Caesar does not run. The whole European tradition of what we call and value as liberty derives from a culture in which no one power was supreme. And Rosenstock has shown how deeply the dogma of the fundamental equality of men was impressed upon Europe by the rituals surrounding death and the commemoration of All Souls. The Christian conviction that men die equal was more potent than the humanist abstraction that men are born equal.

We might say that all the things men strove for at the Renaissance were the things Europe had unconsciously learnt from the eighth to fifteenth centuries and from the Ancient World. And these were not impossible aims so long as the less deliberate parts of life: family, work and eating, social consciousness, regional and local health, status and exchange, had a certain natural vitality. They provided few intellectual problems though there were plenty of practical ones. Men's activities arose naturally out of their needs.

THE DISPLACEMENT OF EUROPEAN CULTURE

A News-Letter Supplement is too small for even a summary of the forces in the modern world that have displaced the characteristic European culture. It has a vast literature from the pens of men like Nicolas Berdyaev, Christopher Dawson, Reinhold Niebuhr and Lewis Mumford. I will name but three major influences. The first is in the realm of outlook upon existence. Modern man has long been taught to know himself only as an item in the historic process and to recognize no reality apart from that of the temporal world. Denial of the transcendent is the characteristic of modernism, and this leads man to deal with life only in terms of relation to his environment, to the social whole, and to the past and future. It obscures the really religious dogma that the person is, in Kierkegaard's phrase, the "point of intersection of time and eternity." From this complete change of outlook I derive the terrible paradox that modern man is in great

control over things and is also carried along by a process he cannot control. It is this sense that social development has a momentum of its own, at variance with true human purposes, that gives all sensitive people the feeling that even apart from dangers of atomic destruction there is a doom on our civilization. We have lost the up and down dimension in existence—the penetration of eternity into time—the spiritual depth in all finite things that can give meaning to the temporal process. And with this has disappeared not only the axiom that human life owes an obedience to the Divine Will, but also any conviction that there is a permanent structure of human life—relating man's material, mental and spiritual powers in an order which reflects the essential nature of man. There is, therefore, no test by which we can detect whether what is going on is in the truly human interest. Man is like a minnow whirled along in an impersonal flood he has set flowing.

Then, in the second place, we have tended to put all our confidence to control the drift of things in the rational and scientific method. But this provides only powerful instruments, it does not by itself provide direction or determine purposes. There is a confused debate about this which should be cleared up. The scientific mind is one of the finest products of the human spirit. As Lewis Mumford puts it: "This displacement of limited egoistic wishes, this reference to common data and to objective methods of proof, open to all other competent men, is one of the real contributions of science to the human personality itself." And while our culture was still relatively robust, the growing powers of the scientific mind were rightly hailed as possible aids in the betterment of human life. From the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries men of science were learners from existence—they worked from out of a culture and from a place on the earth which supported their life and that of all other men, in the non-rational, vital and personal parts of existence. But then came this exaggerated confidence that because the universe could be so well handled by reason and experiment, these would be able to control existence itself, whereas total existence of man consists in all the activities of human beings in their concrete setting, and this includes so much that is not rationally to be apprehended. So it has come to be assumed that anything that could be done technically should be done technically and that life would be the better for it. One result is that we are made for efficiency—for things that are useful for something else. What the whole equipment is for is some undated millenium in the future—an altar on which has been sacrificed perhaps more victims than on any other. Our vast technical civilization is providing more and more powerful means to do things and less opportunity for doing anything we can enjoy, that is to say, anything satisfying for its own sake. In particular it is supplying great sources of pure energy while the civilization it creates is eating up the sources of life in the earth, in local, regional and national growths, and it will soon be easier to get a wireless than a cabbage (if you have its price in your pocket), a power-station than a house, or an aeroplane than a shirt.

Thirdly, the whole economic side of what is called "industrialism" has defeated the right and proper use of the machine. To condemn the machine is a romantic error and a theological mistake. But a civilization with machines that has to set up full employment as a social goal is one which has somehow divorced the activity by which men earn their living from the purposes for which they work. So we have to make more machine products in an expanding economy in a world where the spread of the industrial arts is making expansion for everybody arithmetically impossible. It also means that a man must turn more and more steel into machines in order to buy a loaf of bread. Good food, good houses, good clothes, all these become too expensive in a world where the production of bigger technical and state equipment is given higher and higher priority. This is an ironical consequence of a development which, it was hoped, would give the masses of men what had before been the privilege of the sheltered classes.

THE USELESSNESS OF BETTER BEHAVIOUR

These are but some of the forces forming our culture, put roughly and crudely, but it is to be noticed that they are there, independently of moral and political situations. That is to say, their disintegrating effect will not be arrested by better behaviour of men to men or by changes of political systems. In fact, our moral and political problems largely arise out of the failure of progress to meet men's fundamental needs. There is a gramophone record put on by political and religious leaders, which says that our moral development has lagged behind our technical progress. There could hardly be a slogan better devised for stopping all fruitful approach to the problem of our cultural crisis. For one thing our moral sense is quite healthy enough to give us a good deal of pain over the result. It is not that that is defective. The fact is that when men collectively have brought about a culture and the institutions which run it, it will go as it has been created. And the more inclusive of all parts of human life it is, the more people live by it and think with it and they dare not stop it even if they can stand outside it a moment to look at it. And then this slogan assumes that moral achievement is like technical development, the addition of one success on top of another; whereas moral achievement is a continual and recurring task of bringing behaviour into line with the permanent requirements of human existence. That has to be undertaken by each man and each generation for itself, because sin is a departure from the central relation of man to God, and not a lagging behind in some evolutionary process. The Christian sees it differently. He knows that society is always sick because men are sinful and they alternate between false independence of God and the earth in which they live and move and have their being, and the opposite temptation to renounce responsibility by becoming part of the stream of life—drifting with the process. But society in its more natural and less sophisticated forms has a power of self-healing because it is more like an organism than a machine. Our society is becoming more like a vast interlocking

machine. So a break somewhere endangers the whole and the power of self-healing in society declines.

I am not concerned in this brief statement to establish the details of my diagnosis of the forces in our culture which mould the soul of modern man. Quite likely I have got some of them wrong. But I am deeply concerned to bring conviction that our crisis to-day is of this kind, with a contradiction between our conscious moral and social aims and the forces in our culture which give the soul of modern man a bent telling against the aims. And it is no use saying this can be cured by a different political system. The new dehumanized culture began to affect the lives of everybody with the rise of capitalist industrialism, though the mind of the West had already in the field of ideas lost any pivotal philosophy by which to judge and guide events. But it is an illusion to suppose that its effects will be reversed by a passage from a liberal phase to a socialist phase of the same culture. This thing—whatever we call it—is the most destructive revolution in the history of mankind. It devitalizes the power of the earth to sustain life, it destroys significance in work, it abolishes distributed property, it dissolves the family and all functional associations, it tends to make the majority a restless nomadic population of interchangeable atoms, it takes away all reality from the spontaneous organized activities of society for scientific, educational, and craft purposes; it weakens all social loyalties leaving the only real and strong relationships those of the citizen to the unlimited state.

In such a development what is the good of appealing to men to be more responsible in great world affairs, when the culture undermines their responsibility in smaller ones? What is the good of appealing for a greater respect for Law and Morals in world politics, if all that law and morals can do is to bind a people with some common culture and when the only common culture that now binds people over large distances is an economic scramble to provide work for men and machines? What is the use of preaching community when the nurseries of community in the family and region are enfeebled? What is the use of proclaiming that the aim of education is development of personality, a development involving a selective, choiceful deepening of experience, when the individual is confronted with pressures all round to buy and experience more and more of everything? What is the good of instilling a sense of vocation when men feel less and less significant in their work—unless they get away from producing the elementary needs of life into positions of clerking, planning, controlling—and reforming?

THE WAY OF RENEWAL

Let us not be misled by the slowness with which these things have happened to our culture. There are still remnants of an older, sounder culture. They were our stand-by in the war, but such civilization as that war has left is now likely to eat away those remnants at a faster pace and all in the name of reform and development.

It will surely appear to many that this diagnosis is a gloomy one, for the task of recreating our culture may seem a vaster and harder one than that of moralizing and socializing the existing culture. Well, yes, it is harder than *preaching* these things. But once it is realized to be the real problem of our society, there will be a gathering of all the free energy that is left among men, for they are not really confident with the current diagnosis which purveys moral and political plasters for cultural earthquakes. And there are some objective facts which tell in the direction of a possible renewal of European culture, which could use all the advantages of a century's technical achievement. One is the spread of the industrial arts and the development of scientific processes which mean that each community can, for its own varied and enriched living, mind its own business and what a factor for peace that could be! The period of salvation by expansion is over, though many of our starkest problems in world affairs come from a culture which is still seeking salvation that way. And the time is set for balance and equilibrium in each place.

Christians should know the dynamic effect of the discovery that renewal can begin here—within. And a relatively healthy centre here, within, is a source of healing to the situation around. While the world's best intentions now express themselves in the opposite principle that soundness here depends first on order all over the place, the Christian community can of all forces best help by pulling the human problems this way round. For that is what it should be always learning in the specifically Christian culture which is the life of the worshipping, repenting and hoping Church. Whether we can do this as the Christian community, and show the pattern of all human problems from our knowledge of man under God and man in God—whether we can touch the problems of our time without our faith becoming so “relevant” to the situation that it becomes merely a sanctimonious way of stating the world's problem in the world's own way—well, that is another story.

Subscriptions—12s. 6d. (\$3.00 in U.S.A. and Canada) for one year. 6s. 6d. for six months (Great Britain and Ireland only). Single copies 6d.; reduction for quantities.

Bound Volumes—Vols. II—IX (May 1940—Dec. 1944) 8s. 6d. each post free, or 7s. 6d. in sets of four or more consecutive volumes.

Indices—Vols. I—IX (Oct. 1939—Dec. 1944), 1s. each post free. Index to Vol. X (Jan.—Dec. 1945) now on sale, 1s. post free.

Folders—To hold one year's supply, 3s. each post free.

Groups—Special rates for group subscriptions may be had on application.

All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, 20 BALCOMBE STREET, DORSET SQUARE, LONDON, N.W. 1.